

CONSIDERATIONS
ON THE
AMERICAN STAMP ACT,
AND ON THE
CONDUCT of the MINISTER
Who planned it.

*Confilia primum, deinde acta, postea eventus expectantur.
Cic. de Orat.*



L O N D O N:
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СИТ'КО СКА

deaths and injuries to persons and property.



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MEDICAL XAL

CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

AMERICAN STAMP ACT, &c.

THE American Stamp Act is surely an object worthy of publick attention; its consequences must necessarily extend to us, and greatly affect the commerce, wealth, and prosperity of these kingdoms. For this reason, we find every man who loves his country justly alarmed on the occasion, and sincerely wishing to see all differences reconciled, and a mutual confidence once more established between

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Great Britain and her Colonies—all but the factious Junto, whose ignorance when in power, was the first cause of these troubles, and whose resentment in disgrace still seeks to embroil their country for the paltry satisfaction of embarrassing their successors. It may not therefore be amiss to inquire into the wisdom and expediency of a measure, planned and pursued so warmly by a man, whose character as a Minister, seems to rest solely on his skill in the Finances, and who, from a knowledge of the rule of three alone, undertook to conduct the affairs of a great and powerful Nation. The right of Great Britain to tax her Colonies internally, shall not be the subject of our inquiries: pity it is, that ever such a question should have been started. The Colonies hitherto have ne-

ver denied that right, and certainly would not have appeared at this time to oppose it, had it been exercised with justice, and moderation: be that as it may, we shall for the present confine ourselves to show the injustice of the Act, in so far as it arbitrarily taxes a people for their share of an expence to which they have already so largely and so voluntarily contributed, and its folly in pretending to ease ourselves by choaking up the chief channel of our trade:

To prove our first assertion, let us call to mind the immediate causes of the late war, and mark the behaviour of our Colonies during the progress of it. Our chief differences with the French at that time, related to that part of Nova Scotia

called Acadia, and to the lands of the Ohio. The first mentioned country had been scandalously abandoned by all our Ministers from the treaty of Utrecht, and at last allowed to drop into the jaws of our rivals, more by a supine negligence on our parts, than by any refined policy on theirs. The Ohio was a quite new subject of contestation, and the better fitted for dispute, that neither side understood a word about it. This country had been mentioned slightly by Dr. Cox, Father Hennipin, M. de Salle, and some others, the most early travellers in these parts, but never any exact account had been given. Our Indian traders however had of late become somewhat acquainted with it; and if any pains had been taken by our Ministry to procure proper intelligence of these parts before the treaty

treaty of Aix-la-Chappel, there is no question but some arrangement might have been hit upon to have prevented the bloody and expensive war that soon ensued from so trifling a cause. But instead of this, our late pious and able Secretary of State, my Lord S.—h, (whose growing abilities were then first displayed in peace-making) after giving up Conquests which our Colonies had made in fact, and granting hostages for the delivery of those which ourselves had made *in fieri*, he huddled up the American affairs, in which he was neither instructed nor informed, and referred what he could not explain himself to be cleared up by the Treaty of Utrecht, which does not say a single word about the matter. No sooner was this everlasting peace sworn to, than Commissa-

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ries were appointed to try to make it last a little longer; that is, in fact, by renewing of old disputes, and stirring up new ones, to lay foundation for another war. The Ohio was the readiest bone of contention to take up again, as there was no principle of right to appeal to; but while the Commissaries at Paris were straining hard for bad reasons on both sides, the enterprizing spirit of a French General, and the interested spirit of a London Merchant, brought the thing to a speedy decision on the spot. This latter had solicited and obtained a grant of these lands for the purposes of traffick, and had actually proceeded to fix a warehouse on the banks of the Monongahela, whose waters communicate with the Ohio, when M. Duquesne, the Governor of Canada,

Canada, set out with troops and cannon, according to the genius of his nation, to build a fort upon the same river. Not content with establishing himself, he insisted on the English quitting the place; the match was not equal, the Traders were obliged to give way to the Troops, and thus the unjust ambition of the French in one day determined, by the *ratio ultima regum*, what for three years, with the help of Puffendorf and Grotius, had puzzled our Commissaries to decide. These violent proceedings of the French immediately alarmed all our Colonies; they thought as Englishmen, and saw the necessity of early opposing the powerful and declared rival of their Mother Country. Could they but for a moment have divested themselves of the idea of this relation,

lation, the danger was neither direct nor imminent. The Ohio lay at an immense distance from most of them, and the loss of a blockhouse on that river could no more affect them, than the taking of Fort St. David's on the coast of Coromandel; even the Virginians themselves, who were its nearest neighbours, were at least three hundred miles removed, with a chain of high and difficult mountains between. Yet these faithful Colonists looked upon the cause of Great Britain as their own, and their interests as undivided, and took up the quarrel as more properly belonging to them, because they then imagined, what has since proved to be a mistake, that this new French fort lay within the limits of their wide and indefinite charter. This particular Colony then made
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the strongest representations at home, both of the danger from the French projects, and the necessity of repelling their first encroachments; and the return from their kind mother country was, leave given to drive the French from thence if they could; that is, they were generously allowed to fight her battles at their own expence; to which, indeed, she added a mark of bounty that deserves especial notice; she sent them half a dozen of pop-guns, and a few barrels of powder, to help on the business. Thus were both the blood and treasure of the Virginians engaged in the quarrels of Great Britain, before ever there was a single man, or a single shilling granted for that purpose at home.

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During

During the whole war they also pursued the same measures with the most unabating zeal; besides a standing regiment of one thousand men, brave and well disciplined, by the consent of all our commanders in chief, they occasionally maintained two thousand men additional, militia in actual service, and rangers; recruits were also levied at their charge for the king's troops, forts were constructed, barracks built, carriages and provisions furnished, and every aid granted that could forward the success of the general war. The contingent expences of this Colony alone exceeded 50,000 *l. per ann.* one year with another, and they actually at this day groan under a debt of 150,000 *l.* contracted in the common cause. I have not singled out Virginia as exerting itself with
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any peculiar spirit on this occasion; the fire indeed first caught there, but it soon spread universally through an extent of 800 miles, from New England to the Carolina's, each Colony endeavouring to out-do the other in its efforts; nor was this spirit ever check'd but by the particular circumstance of a proprietary government in one or two provinces. The four divisions of New England alone maintained 20,000 men, and the other Colonies in proportion, besides their shares in all the other attendant expences. Let us consider at same time the peculiar hardships they laboured under in raising supplies for these exigencies; they are intirely excluded from the easiest and least felt mode of taxation by a duty upon goods imported, which

renders every private consumer a willing contributor to the public; their importation being almost wholly from Great Britain, who does not permit such a tax; their home manufactures are of too trifling a nature to afford any sum by an excise on their first materials, and their luxury is not enough extended to offer an equivalent to the public, by a high duty on its articles; so that in fact their only ways and means (a term well understood, and as well made use of in England) lies in a capitation, and arbitrary imposition on lands and its produce. These are resources always grievous in their nature, and doubly so from the means of exacting them, and more especially to our Colonies at that time, when great part of their lands were desolated and laid waste by the inroads of

a savage enemy, whose only end of conquest was to destroy. Thousands of people were then forced to abandon their habitations, and become a burthen to that very state which hitherto they had helped to support : besides, they have not the blessed facility of throwing the burthen on their grand-children, like our ministers here, who, with the help of douceurs and Change Alley, can raise more by Scrips and Omniums, in one day, than the nation can pay off in a hundred years. Their only expedient then was the pernicious one of emitting Paper Money for their present supply, to be cancelled in a few years by taxes paid into the Treasury ; an expedient in itself dangerous, and which by its nature increases the inconveniency it means to remove, because the more paper there is in

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circulation, the more appearance of money is there in the country, and consequently the more will be demanded; as the price of every commodity which this paper is intended to purchase: so that every emission of paper created a fresh necessity of emitting more; and their expences by this circumstance alone, kept annually augmenting in proportion to the means used for supplying them. This reasoning may not appear clear to those who have never reflected upon these matters, but those who have will see its justness at first glance. I shall therefore avoid a farther discussion of this point, and resume our detail of the North American inconveniences.

At the very time they were thus straining every nerve in the publick service at home,

home, they paid doubly for every necessary which they had from abroad. The manufactures of England, of which they are so great consumers, came to them loaded with new duties, extraordinary freights, and high insurance, while their European and African trade were greatly diminished by the loss of markets and risks attending them.

After all, in representing the zeal of the Americans, we do not mean to insist that it was at all times most properly exerted : that it was not, is only a truth that adds one inconveniency more to their list, without detracting in the least from the merit of their intentions. They have not the happiness, as in this high-favoured country, to be always ruled by the best and wisest among

among them; their troops were often expensively raised, badly composed, and worse conducted: besides, they had contractors, agents, commissaries, and pay-masters, a sort of vermin we are utter strangers to here, who swallowed up in private what was destined for publick service. But on the whole, whoever will consider coolly the situation, circumstances, numbers, and riches of our Colonies, compared with those of their Mother Country, will not hesitate to pronounce that they exerted themselves in the common cause, out of all proportion, during the late war, at least if we take from the scale of Great Britain forty millions contracted on the score of Germany.

Such then were the efforts made by our Colonies, which now-a-days seem almost forgot,

forgot, although fairly acknowledged at the time by the Legislature here, when they were voted a sum from year to year, not indeed as a proper compensation for what they had done, but as an encouragement for what they were still expected to do.

Let us next consider the state of our Colonies after the Peace of 1763. From that period it is true, great part of their annual expences ceased ; but they still remained taxed for the sinking of those debts which they had contracted in the war, and they were still obliged to defend their frontiers against the hostile attacks of the unsubdued Indians, who did not cease to harass them. Their back settlers had not yet reassumed their deserted possessions, and their

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former industry and the trade of their cities was newly cramped by injudicious and vexatious regulations. It will hardly be imagined, that a Minister who dared to place himself at the head of the affairs of an intelligent and commercial people, should be so devoid of the very principles of trade, and so confined in his views of its different combinations, as to give orders for lopping off one of its most flourishing branches, because it stood in the way of a jealous and impotent neighbour. Mr. G— G— was however the Minister that did this; he appointed cruizers to lay in wait for our North Americans that carried on an interloping trade with the Spaniards, who take off this way immense quantities of English manufactures, and give solid bullion in return;

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and shortly after, he formed the unjust and impolitick design of taxing them internally amidst all their distresses. The review we have made of their conduct at the rise, and during the progress of the war, will easily set aside the plausible plea of making them contribute their share towards the general expence of what was done for the general benefit. I have shown that they were not sparing either of blood or treasure in the common cause; it now remains to prove the bad policy and inexpediency of the Act; and this, I think, will fully appear from the following simple considerations.

The North Americans, connected with us by blood, laws, customs, religion, and subjected to us entirely as to commerce,

may be justly esteemed in the light of tenants, who labour the lands for the advantage of the proprietor. What articles of their produce we consume ourselves, are useful to us in the highest degree, and only serve as *materia prima* for some valuable manufacture; of these are iron, pitch, tar, turpentine, flax-seed, furs, and skins, lumber of all sorts, and lastly tobacco, which, besides being an object of manufacture, gives rise to the most equitable, easy, and effective branch of the publick revenue. But their chief commodities, such as fish, wheat, Indian corn, rice, and the greatest part of their tobacco, are sold abroad, and the accumulated prices of their first value, freight, and merchant's gain, remitted almost wholly to England. Indeed the carriage or freight of tobacco and
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rice, we have entirely in our own hands ;
 and it is computed that 700 sail of vessels,
 manned with 10,000 seamen, victualled
 and fitted out from Great Britain, are em-
 ployed in the transportation of these ar-
 ticles only. Thus it plainly appears, that
 we do not trade with North America upon
 the advantage of a ballance only, as with
 our most favoured foreign allies, but that
 in fact we are masters of almost their whole
 income, which is laid out in the produce
 and manufactures of this country, and in
 this market we have no competitors, nor no
 rival to undersell us ; an advantage we en-
 joy no where else, so that we insure not
 only a certain and constant employment
 for our industrious poor at home, but also
 levy imperceptibly a considerable part of
 our public revenues on our Colonists, who
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are thus constant customers for commodities which are loaded with duties and excise on the materials used in their composition, or consumed by the artificer who works them up. An intelligent minister, who considers this, will seek for no other means of taxing the Americans, than by encouraging among them a more extensive consumption of our manufactures, and this is to be done by promoting the cultivation of their lands, and opening new markets for its produce. Give but their industry full scope in this way, and we shall have no reason to fear its becoming our rival in the more complicated arts. Agriculture is the most simple of all labours, and presents itself first to the mind of man; and in a country full of uncultivated forests, and unoccupied lands, it is
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Not to be supposed that the inhabitants will ever turn themselves effectually to any other object, while that remains unfilled up; the vain attempts made in some of their most populous cities, which have always come to nought, is an infallible proof of what I say. Nothing but the spirit of resentment is able to bear up against the discouragements attending a new manufacture, especially when it comes in competition with a long established and unrestrained rival, and nothing is so well calculated to raise up that spirit in our Colonies, as the late wanton and unnecessary exertion of power; I say unnecessary exertion of power, not only from the above maxim, that they are better and more effectually taxed by means of the goods they buy of us; but as I am likewise fully per-

suaded they might have been brought by easy methods to have taxed themselves, each in their separate Assembly, in a manner more equal, and better suited to their circumstances.

It is needless to cavil against particular clauses of an act, that on the whole I deem, injudicious, unjust, and arbitrary in the highest degree. But to do honor to the man who plumes himself on the character of an able financier, I cannot avoid taking notice of that, which ordains all the duties to be paid in silver, at 5*s.* 6*d.* *per oz.* The North Americans have no gold or silver mines, and the specie that comes in by foreign trade being almost immediately transported to Great Britain, they have been obliged universally to substitute paper
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for the medium of circulation; this, however, is never issued without some fund to realize it in a few years (as we have observed already) so that it represents either corn, rice, tobacco, or some real riches of the country; and on this footing has a solid credit, and free currency, in the purchase of all sorts of property. The Stamp Masters then could never have found any difficulty in converting this paper into sterling, at the current exchange; and to require the payment of this tax in any coin but what the country affords, was vexatious and absurd, and much as if the king of Spain should demand his quinto of the silver mines of Potosi, in stock fish, or English cloth. Thus we see all along equal justice and wisdom in the minister who first conceived this act, and his candour

will be best shewn by the means he took to carry it through, with his aftergame, in spreading it as a toil for the new administration.

At the time this imposition was first thought of, he had two notable precedents for his conduct; M. Choiseul, the minister of France, and M. Squilaci, the minister of Spain, had just formed the like projects, for the good of their respective Colonies; whether our celebrated Mr. G— G— really acceded to their *pact de famille*, or only acted from a similarity of sentiment, is not for me to determine; 'tis certain, however, that he pursued their plan exactly, with this disadvantage, indeed, on his side, that he was obliged to pass his orders through the tedious forms of a certain house,

house, while his brother Viziers had only to issue their despotic mandates ; and they have already had the happiness to see their countries distressed, and their colonies driven to a state of actual rebellion, one year sooner than he with all his industry has been able to effect. Let us do justice, however, to his intentions, he carried it through with all possible dispatch ; after having, by a specious vote, lulled the Colonies into a security, that their cause should be fairly heard, before judgment given, he threw out their petitions, and hurried on the bill, before the Members had opportunity to inform themselves on the head. The Colonies were also, on this occasion, served by their agents, as they ever will be by men who have no other interest in their welfare than what their salaries give ; in-

stead of publishing out of doors what was rejected within, these passive agents, if I may use the expression, pocketed their cold representations upon their first refusal at the house, and afterwards sat unconcerned spectators of an event that was to bring ruin on their constituents.

Not long after this, our gracious sovereign, the father of his American, as well as of his British subjects, chased these wicked counsellors from his presence, and placed about him men, who, by their virtues in private life, and constant appearance in the cause of liberty, had already ingratiated themselves with the people; it is to these men the Colonies turn in hopes of redress, in hopes of their complaints being born to the foot of the throne, and fairly discussed in the great assembly of the nation, in spite of the mean device of their enemies,

enemies, who have already attempted to prejudice their cause by a precipitate vote, branding the un consequential tumults of a giddy mob with the odious name of rebellion ; the iniquity of this design could only be heightened by the dirtiness of the method employed to carry it on ; if after having pawned their honor that no advantage should be taken of the absence of the King's Ministers, they should not be able to resist what would appear to them a golden opportunity of triumph, and should bring on the debate, supported by the perplexed drawings of the great Financier, and the boisterous vociferations of the discarded V--e T--r; forming a contrast, in eloquence, not less ludicrous than that of Bramble and Target in the play. Such a motion, I say, would certainly turn to their confusion, and the meanness of the attack would serve sooner to defeat it ; perhaps even in another place

a nobleman, eminent for his parts, as well as for his virtues, unattached to any party, might be so fired with indignation at the baseness of the trick, that he would stand up an able and unexpected advocate for the injured Americans.

Nothing can be more cruel and absurd, than to pronounce a whole people rebellious, because a few unavowed rioters get together and burn a coach. Indeed I wonder our discarded Courtiers could not think of a more proper name than rebellion for these occurrences; it would have been more suitable to their genius to have stiled them a Libel,^d and to have proceeded by way of General Warrant against them. The mob in every country are ready to rise against a New Tax; and if this is rebellion, we have enow in the land we live in, within these few years, (besides the Scotch rebellion,

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which

which was pretty serious) we have had the rebellion of Beer, the rebellion of Cyder, the rebellion at burning the North-Briton, and last of all, the rebellion of the Weavers, from which I also believe, one of our chief Rulers at the time apprehended more danger to his coach than either to church or state. Besides, these American tumults can hardly be said to oppose an act that was not in force at the time they happened, but in fact these are not the most dangerous symptoms of the disease; such breakings out have been often regarded, by able statesmen, as a favourable crisis, by which nature throws off the peccant humours in the body politic. The famous regent Orleans, after a new imposition on the town of Paris, asked his prime agent, the Abbè du Bois, what the Parisians said, "Nothing," replies the other, "Nothing," says the Duke, that looks bad indeed; but

but some days after being informed that their ill humour broke out in popular tumults, and satyrical verses against both himself and his minister, he “ thanked “ God that all was well again.”

It is not from these riots in America that I apprehend the most dangerous consequence, the calm deliberate resolution of men of weight and property to leave off the manufactures of Great Britain, should this Act be enforced, is infinitely more alarming. This is what our new Ministry should chiefly attend to, and endeavour to remedy. Their predecessors have happily left them abundance of matter on which to exercise their wisdom and integrity; and this of the Stamp Act first presents itself. They have only one alternative, to enforce or repeal, perhaps indeed a mere suspension, by giving time for the
tempers

tempers of men to cool, which at present seem overheated on both sides, may throw some new light on the road of reconciliation. In the mean time I shall only consider the two methods, one or other of which, as I conceive, must be ultimately pursued. Let us then pursue, in imagination, the consequences of each of these systems. First, let us suppose fleets equipped, and armies raised, to reduce these rebellious North Americans. It is not to be expected that the spawn of the old Cromwellians will submit without a blow; they will still find Scripture to justify their Covenant; the sword of the Lord and of Gideon will be once more drawn; and all Israel will take to their tents to oppose the Egyptian Task-Masters, who would force them to make brick without straw; then must there ensue, resistance, havock, and desolation: their fine but defenceless cities

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destroyed,

destroyed, their lands laid waste, and their wives and children driven to the very savages for shelter, from their still more savage countrymen. Let us suppose them subdued, and prisons, gibbets, impeachments, and attainders, employed as usual against the losing party. What are the mighty fruits of this boasted victory? The arbitrary right of taxing internally the poor dejected remains of our once industrious and flourishing brethren, and an yearly diminish revenue of 30,000 at most raised by the Stamp Duty, instead of 2,000,000*l per ann.* laid out in the manufactures of Great Britain, while our Merchants at home fail by the loss of their debts in America, which now would be past recovery; our poor artisans would starve for want of employment, our shipping lay by the walls, and our generous and intrepid seamen go on the highway, or

enter into the service of a foreign enemy. In fine, the idea of despotism, given by the most just and acute of all writers on laws and policy, would then be realised. " *Quand les sauvages de la Louisiane veulent avoir du fruit ils coupent l'arbre et cueillent le fruit.*" Mont.

Let us now view the picture in another light; let us suppose the Act repealed; the Americans would unquestionably embrace with transport such a condescension on the part of their Mother Country, their resentment would soon subside, and their hasty resolutions be forgot; our merchants would no more tremble for the vast sums they have sunk among them, our poor be again employed, our ships cover the Western Ocean; and, as an equivalent for the paltry sum given up to the Colonies, we should once more see peace, plenty, and cordi-

cordiality reign through all the British dominions. Our present administration are no ways bound in honour to support an unjust measure, which was the sole work of their present ignorant and factious opposers; and no private man, who has a vote in the affair, need be ashamed to acknowledge that, upon better information, he sees the inexpediency of a law, that offering a futile relief to Great Britain, lays a grievous and unequal taxation on her Colonies. The question of right, while merely speculative, can never create a difference; the Parliament here may assert it, and the Assemblies there will not deny it.

Indeed, supposing this right well ascertained, it appears that, in sound policy, while our Colonies continue to stand in the relation to us they do at present, it ought seldom or never to be exercised; I will venture

ture to declare this on the high authority of Montesquieu, already quoted, who says something on this subject so apposite to my purpose, that I shall make no apology for giving the translation at length—"In certain monarchies in Europe, there are some provinces, which, by the nature of their privileges are in a better condition than others, with regard to taxes; your shallow-pated politicians always fancy they don't pay enough, because, by the peculiar happiness of their government, they are really able to pay more; and ministers of this stamp are always scheming to take away these privileges, which in fact produce the very ability to pay at all, and which it would be much wiser to let them still enjoy."

These are the reflections arising to an impartial man from the American Stamp Act,

Act, and this is the conduct expected from Ministers, whose glory it is to be true friends to the people, while they are zealous servants of the King. In acting in this manner, they will shew themselves neither Scotch Ministers, nor English Ministers, nor American Ministers, but Ministers of the whole British Monarchy, and worthy to conduct the affairs, as well as to command the affections of a free, happy, and united people.

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